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ABSTRACT

Criticisms leveled at readiness tests in general by a variety of early childhood groups and at reading tests in general by reading researchers certainly appear to be valid for traditional paper and pencil reading readiness tests. These reading readiness tests have not kept pace with advances in early literacy instructional techniques, such as those represented by the whole language approach. They assess isolated skills that may have very little to do with whether or not a child is able to gain meaning from print in the environment or can understand the purposes and functions of print. While other tests, such as the Linguistic Awareness in Reading Readiness (LARR) test, the Concepts About Print (CAP) test, and the Test of Early Reading Ability (TERA) represent significant advancements in assessing some of the concepts deemed important in early reading, they, too, have disadvantages which make their use impractical in most cases. Systematized observation, performed by responsible teachers who have a knowledge of reading and writing processes, the developmental process, and observational and record keeping procedures and analysis, represents one very useful tool for assessing growth and development in early reading and for providing information for making the daily instructional decisions that must be made by classroom teachers. Thirty-one references are cited. (RH)

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Assessing Early Literacy

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ASSESSING EARLY LITERACY

INTRODUCTION

Reading researchers (Valencia & Pearson, 1986; Squires, 1987) have begun to decry the fact that reading assessment in general has not kept pace with advances in reading theory, research or practice. At the same time, a variety of early childhood groups (e.g., the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education) are arguing that kindergarten children are being tested too early ("'Readiness' goal", 1987; "Georgia to test kindergarteners", 1988; "Early testing", 1988). The Early Childhood and Literacy Development Committee of the International Reading Association ('Joint Statement', 1986) stated:

> The pressure to achieve high scores on standardized tests that frequently are not appropriate for the kindergarten child has resulted in changes in the content of programs. Program content often does not attend to the child's social, emotional, and intellectual development. (p. 820)

If reading tests in general have not kept pace with advances in reading theory and instruction and if the criticisms leveled at kindergarten testing in general are valid, then what are the implications for the appropriateness and usefulness of reading readiness testing as it is traditionally conducted in kindergartens? Is such testing of any use at all? If not, then what assessment tools are available that are congruent with current conceptualizations of early literacy and that will provide teachers with the information needed to make the important everyday instructional decisions that they are required to make in their classrooms?

The work reported herein was supported in part by grants from the NYS/UUP Professional Development and Quality of Working Life Committee and the FASE Research Incentive Program.

To answer these questions, a summary of current thinking on reading theory and instruction will be presented; an examination of existing conventional reading readiness tests and more recent early literacy tests will follow; and finally alternative procedures will be suggested that provide information for both formative and summative evaluation purposes.

ADVANCES IN READING THEORY AND INSTRUCTION

Ethnographic studies of early readers (Mason & Allen, 1986; Taylor, 1986) have suggested that in becoming literate young children are learning about:

- functions and uses of literacy
- attitudes toward literacy
- conventions of written language
- decoding and encoding strategies
- comprehending and composing strategies

To facilitate these types of learnings, reading theorists and researchers have begun to advocate an instructional approach that emphasizes the fact that meaning is not in the text itself but rather develops during an active transaction between the reader and the text. They emphasize the fact that to a great extent reading involves whole-to-part processing.

The whole language approach illustrates this idea by basing instruction on an integration of reading, writing, listening and speaking. This notion stresses that all language processes are related and that learning about one aspect will help promote learning about the others. The whole

language approach builds on children's curiosity about communication systems, their need to make sense of the world around them, and their prior knowledge of communication skills (Weaver,1988). Letter/sound relations and sight words are not taught as prerequisites to reading; rather children learn them through repeated exposure to songs and rhymes, stories, and signs and labels for objects in the classroom.

This whole language approach differs from the skills-based approach currently advocated in many basal reader readiness books. The basal readiness approach focuses on skills for identifying words rather than on strategies for constructing meaning from the text. Even comprehension is taught as a set of hierarchical skills which proceed from part-to-whole. The skills approach reflects the part-to-whole, text-to-reader approach which reading theory and research have begun to see as an inadequate reflection of how people actually read.

Thus it appears clear that the whole language approach does reflect advances in reading theory and research while the traditional basal readiness approach does not. If one were to try to assess the learning which has taken place in a classroom which has used the whole language approach, it seems that the assessment tools used should reflect the whole-to-part, active processing stance of that approach. Do standardized reading readiness tests reflect that stance?

SKILLS ASSESSED BY STANDARDIZED READING READINESS TESTS

Ten years ago when Mason and McCormick (1979) listed the specific skills that were tested in the then current reading readiness tests, the following skills were represented:

listening comprehension	letter recognition
auditory discrimination	visual discrimination
auditory blending	copying
following directions	word meaning
draw-a-man	learning rate

Of those, visual and auditory discrimination and letter recognition were most frequently included.

Ten years later, current editions of the most widely used reading readiness tests appear to test very similar skills. Five of the most widely used of those standardized tests of early reading ability are:

Clymer-Barrett Readiness Test, Rev. Ed., 1983

Gates-McGinitie Reading Tests, 2nd. ed., 1978, Basic R

Metropolitan Achievement Test, 1986, Primer Level

Metropolitan Readiness Test, 1986, Level 2

Stanford Early School Achievement Test, 1982, Level 2

An examination of these tests shows that auditory and visual discrimination, grapheme/phoneme correspondences, letter recognition, listening comprehension, word meaning, and visual-motor coordination are still deemed important factors in tests of early (K.5-1.9) reading ability. In addition, sentence meaning is also considered an important skill to assess in these current instruments.

(Insert Table One About Here)

When the way in which these skills are assessed is analyzed, it is easy to agree with Kenneth Goodman's comment that, "Unfortunately, most standardized tests of reading and writing focus strongly on isolated skills and words. If they use connected texts, these are often short, disjointed, and deliberately obscure to make them harder" (1986, p.42). For example, the *Stanford Early School Achievement Test, Level 2*(Madden et.al., 1982) has a subtest entitled Sounds and Letters. One part of it assesses auditory discrimination in a manner similar to the following example.* After doing the practice activities, the students are requested to "Move down to the next row and put your finger on the dog. Next to the dog, you see pictures of a chair, a duck, and a dress. Mark under the one that begins with the same sound as dog." While the items in this part of the subtest do assess auditory discrimination, they fragment the language elements in a way that decontextualizes the skill.

Letter recognition is assessed in a similarly isolated manner in the *Clyde-Barrett Readiness Test, Revised Edition, Form B*(Clymer & Barrett, 1983). In a subtest entitled, Recognizing Letters, the children are asked to "Put your finger on the picture of the rabbit. In the box next to the rabbit, find the letter x. Draw a line through x , the letter x. This type of item obviously is not in the context of any real reading situation, and it is also presented, at times, in a manner that could easily confuse the children. For example, each item is preceded by a picture of something to help the children keep their place on the page. In most cases the picture is

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* While all test items have been disguised by the author so as not to reveal actual items from the tests, they are based on real items and situations.

not particularly confusing to the children, but in some cases one of the letter choices is the same initial consonant with which the figure in the picture begins but it is not the letter which the test administrator asks the children to mark. That is, the place-keeping picture is a rabbit, the letter asked for is an x, and the choices are c, d, x, and r. Might a youngster logically match the picture of the rabbit with the letter r instead of the letter x?

The Metropolitan Readiness Tests, Level 2(Nurss & McGauvran, 1986) has two subtests which are categorized as testing visual discrimination. The first, Visual Matching, consists of items in which the student is to match two boxes that contain the same thing. Of the ten items in this part of the subtest only two require the children to match real words, the others ask them to match numerals, symbols, or parts of words. The relationship of such a task to a real reading situation is difficult to see. The second subtest, Finding Patterns, consists of items where the child is to match "groups" of letters. The directions to administrators specifically caution them not to use the term "word". An example might be that the children are asked to match the group pad with one of the following: space, spade,sparse, spido. Again, the students' ability to visually discriminate is assessed in a manner completely out of context with any real reading task. Note that real and nonsense words are intermingled in the same item and that a child is actually asked to fragment a one syllable word, spade to match the group pad. In addition the pronunciation of the pad alone differs from its pronunciation in spade.

Grapheme/phoneme correspondence is assessed in a subtest called Phoneme/Grapheme Consonants in the Primer Level of the *Metropolitan Reading Diagnostic Tests* (Farr et al., 1986). After illustrating two practice items, the test administrator is directed to say something similar to "Move down to the next row and put your marker under the row with the baby. Mark the space next to the word that starts with the same sound as baby. There are thirty such items which require the children to match the initial or ending sound that a picture represents with one of three printed words. This is hardly an example of reading in context, but does represent the bottom up view of the reading process that is present in the skills based approach.

Finally one last example illustrates the way in which comprehension of sentences is assessed in the *Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests, Basic R, Form 2* (MacGinitie, 1978). In this subtest, consisting of 8 items, the students are directed to look at a "little story" under four pictures. Then they are to read the story silently, find the picture that goes with the story, and mark that picture. A sample story might be similar to the following, "Joe and his little sister rode their bikes." This "story" , which is only one sentence long, has very little connection to real reading comprehension where interest, purpose, and background information are important variables.

Of course other skills are tested (see Table 1), but in each case they are assessed in an isolated manner. In short, early reading ability is still measured by testing a child's knowledge of a series of isolated skills most of which can be categorized as part of one type of word identification skill, phonics. Very little assessment is provided for other word

identification techniques and even comprehension of words and sentences is assessed in a similarly isolated manner. And nowhere in any of the tests evaluated are there items which address such topics as the function and uses of literacy, attitudes toward literacy, conventions of written language, decoding and encoding strategies other than phonic analysis, or comprehending and composing strategies other than the very simplistic notion of reading a sentence and choosing a picture that illustrates its meaning.

However, the problems with traditional standardized reading readiness and early reading achievement and diagnostic tests do not end with their use of inappropriate and decontextualized items. At best, such tests provide global information about how well children can do tasks such as identifying letters or matching words compared to other similar children. But what kind of instructional decision-making data does a stanine of 6 or a percentile rank of 66 provide for classroom teachers? It is difficult, if not impossible, for them to make daily instructional decisons based on these kinds of test results which are often obtained weeks and in some cases months after the test has been taken.

In summary, these tasks are not directly related to the act of reading and do not allow one to observe how well an individual child understands what the reading process is all about. Is a child able to gain meaning from print in the environment? Does the child understand the purposes and functions of reading? Does a child know how to handle a book? Which conventions of print does the child understand? If questions such as these cannot be answered from the results of a traditional reading readiness test, what is available for teachers who would like to learn what their students know about early reading?

OTHER OPTIONS

The importance of a teacher's knowing about a child's language awareness has led to the formal development and publication of several tests of this construct which are applicable to the classroom. Three of these tests, the *Linguistic Awareness in Reading Readiness Test (LARR)* by Downing, Ayers, and Schaefer (1983), the *Concepts About Print (CAP)* test by Clay (1985,1979,1972) and the *Test of Early Reading Ability (TERA)* by Reid, Hersko, and Hammill (1981) are readily usable by classroom teachers. These tests examine the child in various print related situations and measure aspects of early reading behavior that are more connected to the actual process of reading than the abilities assessed in traditional reading readiness tests. Examples of these actual reading behaviors are the child's awareness of the purpose of reading, awareness of what one does when he or she reads, knowledge of how to handle a book, and awareness of other print conventions.

The *LARR*, designed to be used with children between four and six years of age, is a group test with two equivalent forms. It attempts to measure "children's linguistic awareness and their concepts of reading and writing, and the functions and features of these skills." (Downing et. al., 1983, p1.) This test consists of three subtests: (a) recognizing literacy behavior - which measures the extent to which children can recognize the kinds of activities involved in reading and writing; (b) understanding literacy functions - which measures the child's ability to identify the purposes for which one reads and writes; and (c) the technical language of literacy - which measures their knowledge of the technical terms used to describe written language.

While this test certainly addresses some of the concepts that are deemed important in the process approach to early reading, critics (Day & Day, 1986; Hall, 1987) point out that the structure of the test appears to interfere with the child's ability to express the knowledge that the test was developed to assess. As one looks more closely at the test items, one can see some possible problems. For instance in subtest one, Recognizing literary awareness, the child is instructed to circle the part of the TV picture that people read. One problem that may arise immediately is that the child has had no practice doing such items on the test. The practice items involved circling things in which one can ride and tell time. Might this lack of practice with reading items cause difficulty? Additional items ask the student to circle the person who is reading and the person who is writing. One item asks the student to circle the person who is reading. The answer sheet reveals that a picture of a person writing (The information that the person is writing can easily be determined by the test taker.) is an incorrect answer. We can only assume that this answer is marked incorrect because the person is writing. But do we not read what we write as we write? In a whole language classroom this "incorrect" answer represents an answer that might be considered the most correct one. A close inspection of the items in subtests two and three reveal very similar problems. Such items are not likely to reveal a child's true linguistic ability.

Is the *LARR* useful at all? I believe that the answer is, "Yes". There are at least two ways in which teachers might use it. First, the lists of areas noted on the scoresheets form a helpful checklist that a teacher using observational techniques could use ascertain more about a child's literacy. Second, teachers can use the test pictures, not as a formal test, but as a basis for a general discussion with their students.

Thus, instead of obtaining a response that is judged correct or incorrect, the teacher would be able to follow up and probe children's responses. In this manner, a teacher is alerted to the types of information that may be very useful in planning further instruction about forms and functions of literacy.

The *Concepts About Print (CAP)* test is a measure of the child's knowledge of:

- concepts about book orientation
- whether print or pictures carry the text message
- directionality of words and lines of print and page sequence
- relation between written and oral language
- words, letters, capitals, space, and punctuation.

(Clay, 1985, pp.28-29)

The test consists of a twenty page booklet (Clay, 1972) and has the appearance of a small picture book. Sitting down with an individual child the test administrator states that (s)he is going to read a story to the child but wants the child to help. The child is asked a series of twenty-four questions such as, "Show me the front of this book.", "Show me where to start reading.", "Which way do I go?", "Show me the bottom of the picture." For this question the picture is printed upside down as are the words discussed in a subsequent question.

The *CAP* is easily and rapidly administered and has the advantage of a book that can be repeatedly used and procedures that enable the teacher to observe systematically the child's interaction with a book. However, the test also has some disadvantages. Yetta Goodman (1981) states, "The upside down print and pictures, and the word, sentences, and letters out of order... are not natural to the text and even good readers may miss these because they don't expect such aberration."

Hartley and Quine (1982) also question certain *CAP* testing procedures, particularly ambiguous instructions, when they point out that some children fail to point correctly to the bottom of the inverted picture yet in discussion afterword these same children say they knew it was upside down. Such criticisms illustrate the problems inherent in the standardized adminstration procedures accompanying the *CAP*.

As with the *LARR*, however, teachers can use the test questions in the *CAP* as a basis for observing literacy behavior rather than being tied to the standardized administrative procedures. Once they have familiarized themselves with the ideas implicit in the test, teachers can adapt most of the questions for use with any picture book and discover such student needs as the following (Weaver, 1988, p.386):

1. understanding how books are read and/or in understanding the terminology used in reading instruction.

2. using the most salient graphic cues.

3. hearing the separate sounds in words and/or in blending sounds together.

4. using semantic and syntactic cues to predict and confirm/correct.

5. integrating all of the language cues into a workable system.

Another step in the right direction for early literacy assessment can be found in *The Test of Early Reading Ability (TERA)*, an individually administered test for children from 4 years to 7 years, 11 months of age. This test is designed to "(a) identify those children who are significantly behind their peers in the development of reading; (b) to document children's progress in reading; (c) to serve as a measure in research projects; and (d) to suggest instructional practices" Reid et. al., 1981, p.5).

The *TERA* consists of 50 cards which the authors state will measure three components of early literacy behavior: construction of meaning, knowledge of the alphabet and its functions, and conventions of written language. The test items do appear to reflect current theories of the process of reading in context. In addition, the *TERA* is carefully standardized. Its manual contains extensive data on validity, reliability, and norming group. After administering the test to 60 children Day and Day (1986) suggest that kindergarteners respond well to the test because the variety of stimulus pictures seems capable of holding their attention over the 10-15 minutes required to administer the test.

However, in test reviews in The Ninth Mental Measurements Yearbook (1985), Isabelle Beck and Janet Norris level criticism at the tool because they believe that there is a psychological overlap between items in two of the categories; because items within components do not clearly assess each component; and because there are not enough items which distinguish between children who cannot perform certain tasks, such as forming word associations at all, versus those who are poor readers but who could otherwise succeed at the tasks.

Once again as with the *LARR* and the *CAP*, it appears that certain items in the *TERA* might be most useful as interesting and creative stimuli for teachers to use with their observational checklists. By following up and probing children's responses to the cards in an informal instructional environment as opposed to a structured test environment the teacher has a chance to use the children's responses to items for instructional decision-making purposes. All three tests' usefulness can be extended if their standardized form is ignored and some elements of the tests are used as a basis for discussion and observation.

To summarize thus far, widely-used standardized readiness and early reading achievement and diagnostic tests do not assess aspects of a child's literacy knowledge in which a whole language teacher might be interested nor do they provide timely and useful decision-making data for instructional uses. In addition, other standardized tests such as the *LARR*, the *CAP*, and the *TERA*, which yield more useful information, may result in a child failing to display what (s)he knows because of an inherent design problem. Then, too, standardized tests are not given in a context in which the reading behavior being tested normally occurs. For a child, this type of testing situation may be a strange experience and thus may alter the child's performance. And finally, any formal test can only assess selected parts of the total behaviors needed for reading and writing and may miss important skills and concepts children do possess, thereby severely limiting the teachers' ability to make important daily instructional decisions.

OBSERVATION: THE BEST OPTION OF ALL?

In her book, *The Early Detection of Reading Difficulties*, Clay states, "To become observers of the reading process teachers will have to give up looking for a single short assessment test for the acquisition stages of reading." (1985, p. 3) Thus it would appear that early literacy evaluation in the kindergarten should be an ongoing process of observation and analysis of the children's language behavior and level of functioning. While it is true that children come to school with differing degrees of language ability and will progress at different rates, the fact that children show certain patterns of behavior and tend to pass through a series of identifiable developmental stages allows teachers to monitor their progress if they are adept at observation, record keeping, and

analysis. Through observation teachers may learn about an individual child's emerging literacy and the environment that best facilitates that emergence.

Yetta Goodman (1985) terms such systematic and reflective observation as "kidwatching". A combination of systematically collected observational data, samples of children's work, and brief anecdotal records of classroom behavior can provide information for instructional decision-making, for predicting future development, and for reporting to parents. A thoughtful, systematic, repetitious, and thorough analysis of the data from a variety of observations provides the teacher with an individual record of each child's growth and development in literacy. Such things as the use of print conventions, the use of a variety of cueing systems, the ability to predict, the range of language used, the invented spellings attempted, and other skills can be analyzed from observational data.

While there are a number of different ways to gather observational data, observational checklists relating to various processes, such as those just mentioned, can provide objective and wide-ranging information. By its very nature direct observation carried out using a variety of checklists is a useful assessment tool with non-readers, the young, and the handicapped. It has the advantage of being able to be used at almost anytime; so it permits teachers to identify the level of development in the environment in which the teaching and learning normally take place; and, therefore, it is less obtrusive and threatening than other types of assessment. Furthermore, it allows the teacher to provide direct feedback and immediate redirection to children making it an excellent aid in the instructional decision-making process.

This is not to say that direct observation is without disadvantages. Using a checklist, may lead teachers to be too narrowly focused.. Because certain behaviors are targeted for attention, observers may miss other important information. It may also provide biased information, in so far as observers accept or reject information because of whether or not it fits what they already know. For example, teachers may be inclined to generalize or oversimplify. If they usually see a child in a favorable light in one area, they may expect the same response in other areas. Furthermore, there may be a tendency to arrive at conclusions based on only one or two observations. Good observational assessment is time consuming.

ORGANIZING FOR OBSERVATION

As Goodman and others (Hall,1987; Harste, Woodward, and Burke,1984; and Johnston,1987) point out, expertise in observation is complex and does not come without planning and effort. First, observers must have a framework for making sense of what they see. They must have knowledge of the reading and writing processes, of the developmental process, and of procedural knowledge which helps them know what to look for and helps them become more aware of their biases and philosophical orientation. A format for recording early literacy behaviors in the classroom must be based on the school district's and teacher's philosophy and goals and objectives of literacy development.

Second, the teacher must be able to break those goals and objectives down into observable units that include items that are significant and representative of the literacy processes of the children in that teacher's group. Teachers at the same grade level and across grade levels must

meet and decide what behaviors will serve to demonstrate that the child is progressing toward the ultimate goal of reading and writing with understanding. A series of checklists based on various processes can be designed and used throughout the school year. Experts in the areas of reading and writing might suggest items for the checklists, but the final decision about specific items must be made by the teachers so that they are aware of how each behavior plays a part in demonstrating progress toward the goals and objectives of their school district and classroom.

Third, successful observers must be systematic, yet flexible. If a teacher believes that a child must have an understanding of the concepts of print, then that teacher might use a checklist to record systematically a child's progress. However, there is no one "correct" or "all encompassing" observational list or set of lists. The observational inventory contains important concepts for which a teacher will watch; but it also should provide a mental set that heightens and sensitizes the teacher's awareness to the diagnostic and evaluative potential in all activities in which the children might participate. No matter what framework is used to organize the observational activity, teachers must be open to other behaviors that might provide additional information. If they substitute one or more static observational lists for a standardized reading test, teachers are making little progress in becoming astute diagnosers and evaluators; and, in fact, they may only be substituting one inappropriate set of categories for another. Providing room for anecdotal written comments to accompany the checklists is one way to remind teachers to be aware of other important behaviors and to note them on the checklist. These more global or summary comments plus the specific items chosen for observation supply a well-rounded assessment format for measuring the child's total literacy performance

Fourth, observers must be astute watchers and listeners who can reflect on what is seen and heard in order to extend the child's capacity to use language. To secure appropriate and adequate evidence, they must watch children often and in a wide variety of contexts. They must be patient rather than deciding prematurely that children do not know something or are unable to perform certain tasks. The informed observer recognizes what the child already knows, plans experiences to build on that knowledge, and then observes and listens on a timely basis with appropriate attention, patience, and thoughtful questioning.

No matter which way teachers categorize observations or what types of questions they decide to ask about students' early literacy development, to be really useful, they need an efficient and simple way to record and retrieve the information. If the information collected is not readily available, it may be difficult to use for diagnostic and evaluative purposes. Checklists, designed to fit specific needs, provide one quick and efficient way to keep track of progress over the school year. However, teachers must be sure that they are precise. Instead of including an item that indicates that a student "Shows an interest in reading", they might include an item that indicates a more specific and observable behavior such as "Listens attentively when books are read aloud. The behaviors to be observed must be stated in clear, concrete terms in order to assure validity and reliabilty.

The format must also provide room for several dated entries so that teachers may illustrate the way in which the child progresses, levels off, or regresses during the school year. To make checklist information easily accessible, teachers might keep a folder on each student and place material in it periodically and/or each time something special is noted.

Samples of a student's work that clarify observational data or illustrate a student's skill on a particular task are valuable additions.

ONE EXAMPLE

From the first day that the child enters kindergarten, the teacher can note the verbal and nonverbal behavior exhibited as the children join in activities such as shared reading, free reading, and writing time. After about a month in school, teachers may begin to observe and record children's concepts about books and print using a familiar picture book and questions similar to those used in the *CAP*. The answers to these questions would be recorded on a dated observation checklist (See Figure 1) and used to provide the information necessary to guide the child's literacy learning. Later in the school year the questions can be asked again to assess growth.

(INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE)

EDUCATING POLICY MAKERS

The major advantage of observational assessment is its flexibility, which allows teachers to design it for a special purpose and construct it around materials that are being used in everyday instruction. Observation built around a process-oriented philosophy of reading will provide whole language teachers with the opportunity to evaluate a student's ability to use early literacy skills within the context of "real" reading situations. In addition, by looking closely at a classroom, such teachers also learn

about the ways in which they are interacting with their students and the environment to facilitate the emergence of literacy. Such observation provides teachers with the important knowledge which is the basis for the modification of instruction.

But if whole language teachers are to use observation as an assessment tool in kindergarten, they must educate policy makers in their school system and elsewhere about three important issues:

1. Research in the field of early childhood education has begun to show that there are significant negative effects that standardized, norm-referenced, paper and pencil readiness tests have on young children and the curriculum in kindergarten.

2. The standardized paper and pencil reading readiness tests which are widely used are incompatible with the current best research and theory in learning to read.

3. The standardized, product-oriented approaches to evaluation currently in use in most schools at best indicate in some global manner whether groups of children have or have not made progress in reading since the last testing period. While these assessments might provide information for administrative policy making, they are not helpful for classroom teachers who are faced with making scores of daily instructional decisions for twenty to thirty different children.

4. Individual, process oriented observation by responsible teachers is indeed "real" evaluation. And what is more, it is instructionally more relevant, timely, and useful to teachers in the many daily instructional choices that they face than the standardized product-oriented approaches currently in place.

SUMMARY

The criticisms leveled at readiness tests in general by a variety of early childhood groups and at reading tests in general by reading researchers certainly appear to be valid for traditional paper and pencil reading readiness tests. These reading readiness tests have not kept pace with advances in early literacy instructional techniques such as those represented by the whole language approach. They assess isolated skills that may have very little to do with whether or not a child is able to gain meaning from print in the environment or to understand the purposes and functions of print. While others such as the *LARR* test, the *CAP* test, and the *TERA* represent significant advancements in assessing some of the concepts deemed important in early reading, they, too, have disadvantages which make their use impractical in most cases. Systematized observation, performed by responsible teachers who have a knowledge of reading and writing processes, the developmental process, and observational and record keeping procedures and analysis, represents one very useful tool for assessing growth and development in early reading and for providing information for making the daily instructional decisions that must be made by classroom teachers.

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TABLE 1

TEST NAME	SKILLS							
	Auditory Discrimination	Visual Discrimination	G/P Correspondence	Letter Recognition	Word Meaning	Sentence Meaning	Visual/ Motor	Listening Comprehension
Clymer-Barrett Readiness Test, Rev. Ed., 1983 K.5-1.5	X	X		X			X	
Gates-MacGinnitie Reading Tests, 2nd. Ed., 1978 Basic R 1.0-1.9	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Metropolitan Achievement Test, 1986, Primer Lev. K.5-1.9	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Metropolitan Readiness Test, 1986, Lev.2 K.5-1.5	X	X	X				X	X
Stanford Early School Achievement Test, 1982, Lev. 2 K.5-1.9	X	X	X	X	X	X		X

FIGURE 1

CHECKLIST FOR OBSERVING CHILDREN'S CONCEPTS ABOUT PRINT*

Children's names:	AMY			TRENT			LARA			BROCK			RAGAN		
DATE															
FRONT OF BOOK															
PRINT CONTAINS MESSSAGE															
WHERE TO START															
LEFT TO RIGHT															
RETURN SWEEP															
WORD BY WORD MATCHING															
FIRST/LAST WORDS															
LEFT TO RIGHT															
PUNCTUATION															
CAPITAL/LOWERCASE LETTER CORRESPONDENCE															
LETTERS															
WORDS															
COMMENTS:															

* Adapted from Butler (1985, p. 150).